

SHADOW LOVE

Book One

A Novel By

Eileen Sheehan

©Copyright 2017 Eileen Sheehan

Worldwide Print Rights

Worldwide Electronic & Digital Rights

Worldwide Language Rights

EARTH WISE BOOKS

ELECTRONIC EDITION

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned or distributed in any form, including digital and electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the prior written consent of the publisher, except for brief excerpts for use in reviews.

This book is a work of fiction. Characters, names, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Notice\*\* Portions of this story may prove too graphic, sexually explicit, or violent for sensitive readers. This novel is intended for adult readers.

Notice\*\* This book contains a sneak peek of "Shadow Love Book Two"

.

## CONTENTS

ONE

TWO

THREE

FOUR

FIVE

SIX

SEVEN

EIGHT

NINE

TEN

ELEVEN

TWELVE

THIRTEEN

FOURTEEN

FIFTEEN

SIXTEEN

SEVENTEEN

EIGHTEEN

NINETEEN

TWENTY

TWENTY-ONE

TWENTY-TWO

TWENTY-THREE

TWENTY-FOUR

TWENTY-FIVE

TWENTY-SIX

TWENTY-SEVEN

TWENTY-EIGHT

TWENTY-NINE

SNEAK PEEK AT SHADOW LOVE BOOK TWO

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

# ONE

Alison leaned close to the steering wheel as she peered through the darkness as best she could at the winding country road. The assailing raindrops made a thick watery coating. The wipers of her Mini Cooper struggled to remove as much as possible before the windshield was once again hazy with water. She heaved a sigh and rotated her shoulders and neck as the compact car pushed its way through surface water that threatened to become too dense to maneuver through safely. She tried to remember if it was better to drive slow or fast through deep water to avoid stalling out. She hoped it was slow, since her car was fighting her control even at this speed. Any speed faster and she was sure she would end up in a ditch or hugging a tree.

She wanted to consult the map that dominated the passenger's seat next to her, but stopping in such a high level of water was risky and trying to read it while maneuvering through a torrential rainfall in the pitch of night was even more so. Her mind worked overtime trying to remember the landmarks and road signs. It was a few years since she visited her spinster great aunts and, then, she was a passenger in the back seat of her father's car. A passenger often paid attention to trivial sights, while the driver focused on landmarks and directions. That, plus the fact that she was sixteen, resentful about being dragged to the country, and pining over being separated from the boy she was certain she would love forever the last time she visited, made the chances of her recognizing the landmarks to validate

she was going in the right direction slim, but she hoped and tried anyway.

Her eyes hurt from strain and lack of sleep.

When she left Atlanta, she had not expected to be driving through the dark and stormy night. It was her intention to stay with Arthur for at least one night, possibly two nights. When Sarah answered her knock on the door, it was the last straw in their relationship. He promised that he and Sarah were over. She was foolish and naïve enough to believe him when he repeatedly assured her that she was the only one for him. She recalled her mother's warning - "A leopard can't change its spots". Why hadn't she listened? It took the taunting smirk on Sarah Jenson's beautiful face as she leaned against the door frame to get it through Alison's thick skull.

The fact that Sarah was wearing the tee shirt that Alison bought Arthur as a gag gift last Christmas didn't help the situation. Even in her shock and anger, Alison couldn't help noticing the way the shirt ended just at the point that Sarah's long, slender legs began. Sarah's voluptuous curves tugged and pulled at the fabric in a form fitting way that reeked of sensuality. A wave of sadness and inferiority swept over Alison as she remembered the few times she wore the shirt to sleep in. It hung mid-thigh and had plenty of room to spare. She hoped that, as she progressed beyond her nineteen years to Sarah's twenty-three years, her body might fill out enough to resemble a woman, instead of a teenager. She could not change the fact that Sarah was a sultry five-foot-seven inches and she was a mere five-foot-one inch, but she could at least develop the curves that

would take away the illusion that she was far younger than she was. Being short and not fully developed at the age of nineteen felt like a curse.

Arthur chased after her car for the length of the driveway while he begged for her to let him explain, but what was there to say? He dated Sarah before he dated her. He assured her that he and Sarah were over, yet the wicked witch showed up off and on over the two years they were together.

She stood in his doorway at nine o'clock at night, wearing his tee shirt and a pair of lace panties. That pretty much said it all. Alison's mind didn't work in a way that could even imagine what kind of story Arthur could drum up as an explanation for that one.

She caught a glimpse of a sign up ahead and strained to see it better through the torrential downpour. It read, Reeds Road. Reeds Road climbed to an elevation that was high enough to prevent the rain from collecting on its surface. An enormous sigh escaped her lips as she turned onto the macadam road and gave her car more gas, so it could have the 'oomph' it would need to make the daunting hill she knew awaited her around the next turn.

The only good thing about the heavy rain was the fact that she didn't have to keep an eye out for deer bounding unexpectedly in front of her car. At least, that's what she was told by her father when they used to brave the country roads to visit her great aunts on weekends. As Alison grew up, she complained about how remote the house was and how there was nothing for a city girl to do there so, her accompanying her parents on their visits got further apart, until they eventually stopped.

Her inseparable great aunts seemed to do everything together for as long as Alison could remember. They even died peacefully in their sleep within a few days of each other. Aunt Elsie passed first, at the ripe age of ninety-seven, and then Aunt Beth followed a few days later. She was ninety-five.

The reading of their Last Will and Testament shocked everyone. Since her mother was their only living relative who would naturally be in line to inherit, it was expected that the inheritance would go to her parents. Then, they would leave it to Alison in their Last Will and Testament. The room sat in silent shock when the lawyer informed them that Alison inherited the estate house and grounds along with a trust containing more than enough money to care for herself and the estate.

Her father was clearly upset by the news. It was he who coveted the house. Alison could care less about a remote country estate. What was a nineteen-year-old girl going to do with such a place? The nearest town was a little hamlet with less than one-thousand residents and the nearest city was so small, it barely justified the title. Alison was born and raised in Atlanta. She hated bugs and dirt and required streetlights and sidewalks to feel safe and confident.

Her mother and father weren't completely left out of the Will. Her great aunts had a considerable sum tied up in Certificates of Deposits and mutual funds that were left to her parents. They also made provisions for them to remove some of the antique furniture from the house, as long as it didn't exceed a value of fifty-thousand

dollars; as per the antique appraiser that must be present when the items were removed.

Alison offered the house to her parents almost immediately. She felt it should have gone to them and she couldn't understand why it didn't. Her great aunts must have anticipated that she might do something like that, because the Will had an ironclad clause in it that stated that if any alterations to the Will were requested, all the inheritance would revert to charity and they would get nothing. Her parents declined the offer and said leave well enough alone. The money left to them equaled about one- million dollars. They could and would be content with that.

Her sneaky great aunts placed another provision in the Will that set Alison and her parents on their heels. She was to live in the house alone, without her parents or any other relatives, for a period of one year. If, after one year, she found she could not handle the house or enjoy it, she could do with it as she wished. If she didn't abide by their wishes, the Will would be null and void and all their inheritance would go to charity.

She resented the fact that her parent's inheritance was subject to her actions. If it wasn't, she would have walked away from the lawyer's office empty handed and happy for it. She hated the country. How could she possibly live in that big old house for a year without going insane? She split hairs with the lawyer and got him to agree that her father and mother could visit her for a period of two weeks at a time, every three months. It was better than nothing.

She almost missed the long, tree-lined drive that led to her newly inherited estate house. Fortunately, the posts that outlined the

drive's opening were lit up with lights. It was as if she was expected. She slowly maneuvered her car onto the graveled drive, while admiring the beauty of the white brick posts with their soft, warm, illuminated tops. Her tensed muscles finally relaxed as she pulled up to the front door of the grand estate house. The circular drive was a new addition that she was thankful for. She had no desire to get any wetter than necessary.

She fished the house keys out of her handbag, left the car running and the lights on to help with visibility. After rushing through the pouring rain to the protection of the narrow portico, she quickly unlocked the door. Racing back to the car, she pulled out the bag she packed for the night or two she'd intended to spend with Arthur and rushed back into the house. The rest of the luggage could wait until the morning.

"What did I do to deserve this?" she asked aloud to the lonely house as she fumbled for the light switch.

She knew the electricity was working, because the posts at the end of the drive were lit, yet the lights in the foyer would not turn on. With an exaggerated groan, she searched her handbag for the slender flashlight she kept in it for emergencies. A creepy feel swept over her as she looked around the lonely foyer with a weak and tiny beam. With a shudder, she moved to switch on the table lamp she spotted near the base of the stairs.

Nothing.

Sweat coated her face, neck, torso, and hands as she fought back the panic that came with the realization that she'd have to spend

the night in a creepy two-hundred-year-old estate house while completely in the dark. This just couldn't be happening.

A loud thud from the back part of the house startled her to the point she almost wet her pants. Screaming, she ran frantically back into the rain on legs that felt like melting plastic. She leaned against her car for support while she tried to decide what to do. As far as she knew, there was no motel in that little hamlet. She guessed the time to be around one-o'clock in the morning. It would be difficult to find a place to stay in this backwards part of the state, even if she did know what direction to take once she left the drive. She tried to remember if she passed any motels on her way that would be close enough to drive to and that would be open, but she couldn't recall seeing any. Then, she was so busy sputtering to herself about Arthur and Sarah that she remembered little else about the drive; until the rain intensified and forced her to pay attention.

A deep male voice filtered through the pouring rain from the doorway of the house, "I didn't mean to frighten you."

Alison looked around, but could see no one. She shrunk against the car as best she could. Was it a ghost? The house was old and creepy enough to have plenty of them. She used to insist there were some whenever her parents dragged her there for a weekend, but they would just laugh at her. She wondered if they would be laughing now.

The portico light, the foyer light, and the lights in several rooms in the house went on; creating a warm, inviting effect on such an unfriendly night. She looked at the tall man who practically filled the door of the house with both wonder and awe. She could not

remember seeing him before. His was a face she would remember, no matter how pouty, whiney, and distracted by boys she might be.

“You should come in out of the rain before you develop fins,” he drawled with mild amusement.

Her teeth chattered as she managed to ask, “Who are you?”

“Come in and I’ll tell you,” he said with a cool, casual manner.

Serial killer, rapist, kidnapper, and house squatter all came to mind as she inched her way toward the door. Her body visibly trembled, both from the impact of the cold rain and the nervousness of entering a lonely, secluded house in the middle of the night where a perfect stranger awaited. Her knees threatened to buckle as she put one foot after the other up the small set of stone steps. His strong arms reached out to support her by her elbows just as she reached the top step and her left knee gave way. It was perfect timing.

Her body fell against his in an embarrassingly unseemly manner. She inhaled his rich, musky scent as she placed her palms against his rock-hard chest

and pushed herself away from him.

His rich, soothing voice reminded her of a big cat’s purr as he asked, “Are you alright?”

Still unable to speak, Alison studied his face in hopes of recognizing him and being just a little more comfortable because of it. His deep-set, almond shaped eyes were a remarkable rich tawny. They were framed by well-formed brows that were the same deep chocolate as his thick, wavy hair, and high, distinctive cheekbones. His Anglo nose was centered over slender lips that she was certain echoed whatever mood he was in. Now, they formed a warm, friendly

smile. He wore a closely shaved beard and mustache that matched his brows and hair perfectly. She could detect a distinct cleft in his slightly squared chin that completed the look of gorgeousness. She found him breathtaking.

Pushing past him, she entered the hall and stood in a puddle of water that formed from the dripping of her soaked clothes while saying, "I'm in. So, tell me who you are and why you're in my house."

"I'm guessing you're Alison," he said with a nod of approval. "Which explains the untimely arrival."

"It doesn't explain why you're here," she snapped.

His tone was matter-of-fact as he said, "I live here. I'm the caretaker."

"Not anymore," she said. Handsome or not, she wasn't sharing her house with a perfect stranger. "Now that I'm here, you don't need to be."

"Are you firing me?" he asked with raised brow.

Suddenly remembering the provisions in her aunts' Will stating that the house came with a caretaker and a housekeeper who were to be allowed to stay on for as long as they liked during that one-year period, she scowled. She couldn't fire him.

"Where do you stay?" she asked.

"There's a small guest house out back," he replied.

She glowered at him with open suspicion. "Why were you in the house at this hour?"

"Look, it's clear you don't trust me," he said with a distinct sigh. "Hopefully, that will change. As for why I was here. It's my job. There has been no late-night traffic on that drive for years. When I saw a car

coming up, of course I was going to investigate. What kind of a caretaker would I be if I didn't?"

"What was wrong with the electricity?" she continued.

"This is a two-hundred-year-old house that could use some rewiring. When heavy storms hit, the main house circuit trips. It's common," he replied.

"Why didn't the drive lights go out?" she asked.

"The guest house, a few of the out-buildings, and the drive posts are on a separate, newer circuit than the house," he said with a smile.

"Lucky you," she muttered. "What about Wilma? Isn't she here?"

"It's one o'clock in the morning. Wilma gets up early and puts in a full day," he chuckled.

When he made no further attempt at conversation, she asked, "Do you have a name?"

"Are you always this insolent?" he asked with raised brow.

"When I am forced to stand in a creepy old house in the middle of nowhere with a perfect stranger, I am," she snapped.

"My name's Nick," he said as he started out the door. "I can't do anything about the creepy old house in the middle of nowhere, but I can relieve you of the burden of the company of a perfect stranger for the night."

It was clear she'd hurt his feelings, but she didn't apologize. She spoke the truth and she never apologized for speaking the truth. She waited for him to close the door behind him and immediately bolted the lock. Then, she ran to the back door and bolted it as well. Feeling

somewhat more at ease, she grabbed her travel bag and headed up the winding staircase to the room she always occupied whenever she visited. It wasn't as grand as the master bedroom, but it was a place she was familiar with. Right then, at that time, she needed to feel the security of familiarity around her.

The estate house was grand in its day and was still well kept. Although the fixtures in the Jack and Jill bathroom that connected her room to the room her parents always stayed in were dated. They were in pristine condition. Although there was a torrential downpour outside, there was no lightning. She decided to draw a long bath to warm her bones. Even though it was late and a shower would have been the logical choice, there was enough adrenaline racing through her system to keep her up for hours. A hot bath would not only warm her bones, but it would, hopefully, calm her down enough to fall asleep quickly. After locking her bedroom door, the door to the adjoining bedroom, and both doors in the bathroom, she felt secure enough to enjoy a well-deserved bath.

## TWO

It was still raining the following morning when she awoke; although not nearly as hard. She pulled the covers over her face and inhaled the faint scent of lavender. She wondered if the housekeeper, Wilma, guessed she would be sleeping in that room out of habit, or if the sheets had just stayed that fresh for the many months since she last visited. She guessed it was the first.

Wilma came to the estate long before Alison entered the world. Alison watched her transform from a youthful middle-aged woman of slender frame and fine complexion to an old woman who was nearing her retirement years with thickened waist and sun-mottled skin. It made sense Wilma would know her habits by now. She may not have visited the great aunts much over the last few years, but in her early, formative years, she was there almost every weekend and for weeks during the summer.

The rich aroma of coffee filled the air as Wilma slowly opened the door. She carried a tray laden with scrambled eggs, buttered biscuits, homemade jam, and black coffee.

“You didn’t have to bring that up to me,” Alison yawned.

“Don’t get used to it, child,” Wilma chuckled. “I can’t believe you traveled through that storm. What possessed you?”

“It wasn’t my intention,” Alison said as she positioned herself in bed to accommodate the bed tray over her legs. “Things just happened.”

“You met Nick, then?” Wilma asked off-handedly.

“Where did he come from?” she asked as she took a bite of biscuit. “He’s clearly a recent addition.”

“Henry retired,” Wilma said softly.

“Henry didn’t live on the premises,” Alison said as she wiped a bit of jelly from her chin.

“Nick needed a place to stay and, with things being in constant need of repair, your aunts offered him the guest house. It gave them comfort knowing he was available on short notice,” Wilma said with a grin. “Although I don’t know how much Nick appreciated it.”

“It’s the price you pay for free room and board,” Alison shrugged.

“Where did you hear that?” Wilma said with raised brow.

“I just assumed,” Alison began.

“There’s that old saying, ‘never assume’,” Wilma said. “Nick pays too much rent, if you ask me. Those old ladies worked him to the bone. They should have given him room, board, and pay in exchange for the care he’s given this place.”

“It does look nice,” Alison said thoughtfully.

“You haven’t been around for a few years, so you didn’t see the decline it was in. Poor old Henry just couldn’t keep up,” Wilma said with a slow shake of her head.

Alison finished the last of her coffee while she watched Wilma putter around the room.

“This house is pretty big for you, isn’t it, Wilma?” she asked thoughtfully.

“Are you thinking of retiring me?” Wilma asked hesitantly.

“I was planning on getting you a helper,” Alison said with a smile, “but, that was before I discovered I have a handyman to pay.”

“He prefers to be called the caretaker,” Wilma corrected her, “and you don’t pay him. Since he pays more rent to you than you pay him in wages, technically, he pays you.”

“That will have to change,” Alison said firmly.

“Remember the terms of the Will,” Wilma warned. “Your aunts were firm on things. If I were in your shoes, I’d leave things as they are until I’ve settled and can really evaluate the situation.”

“Knock, knock,” came that familiar deep, sexy voice that lured Alison in from the rain the night before. “I heard voices so, I assume it was safe to bring in the luggage.”

“I’m still in bed,” Alison called out.

“I don’t mind,” Nick said with a devilish tone that reeked of amusement.

Alison hurriedly pulled the covers up to her chin while she watched Nick barrel into the room with every piece of luggage she’d crammed into her tiny car. Other than the way his thick muscles bulged from handling a load that most men would have split in two, he showed no signs of exerting himself.

She caught herself admiring his strong, lean physique at about the same time Nick did. She quickly averted her eyes and pretended to be studying something across the room, but not before she saw him smile.

“Is this the room you plan in occupying?” Nick asked as he straightened his back and studied his surroundings. “It isn’t nearly as nice as the master bedroom. In fact, it isn’t nice at all.”

“I think the dear child wanted to be in a familiar place last night. She never did like the rain or this big old house,” Wilma offered.

“I know you’ve known me since... forever, but I would appreciate it if you didn’t call me child,” Alison said hesitantly.

“Of course, chi.... Alison,” Wilma said.

“I don’t mean to hurt your feelings,” Alison continued. “It’s just that...”

“No hurt feelings here,” Wilma said with a warm smile. “Just an old habit I’ll need to break. Of course, you don’t want to be called child. You are a beautiful young woman and the new mistress of this estate.”

“Is a nineteen-year-old female considered a woman?” Alison asked hesitantly. “My parents may beg to differ.”

“Parents are generally reluctant to let their children grow up. You’ve always acted older than your age,” Wilma assured her. “Your aunts recognized that. Why else would they entrust this place to you? Nineteen is young, but you’re a woman, alright... and a beautiful one, at that.”

“I’m still not finished developing,” Alison whispered while she eyed Nick wistfully.

Wilma studied Alison for a moment. “You’ve got a beautiful figure that simply has room for more development. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“So, do I leave the luggage here or take it to the master bedroom, mistress?” Nick said with impatient sarcasm.

“Master bedroom,” Alison and Wilma said simultaneously.

Alison feasted her eyes once more on the caretaker she inherited while he adeptly collected her luggage in a way that made only one trip necessary.

“I think my aunts were a little off in their old age,” Alison said after Nick left the room. “None of this makes sense.”

“Give it time,” Wilma said as she picked up the breakfast tray. She smiled with satisfaction at the robust way Alison attacked everything she’d provided and headed out of the door.

Alison took her time dressing for the day. She had mixed emotions about the caretaker and she wanted to sort them out before going downstairs where she was certain she’d have to face him sooner, rather than later. On the one hand, she found him ridiculously, magnetically attractive. On the other hand, she had an unsettled feeling whenever she was around him that gave her pause to wonder why.

She pulled a pair of khaki pants and a light blue cashmere tee shirt from her overnight bag and sighed. Arthur bought her that shirt. He said the light blue accentuated her long blonde curls and made her deep blue eyes pop. She shook away the haunting vision of Sarah’s voluptuous body in the tee shirt she’d given to him as she combed out her long locks and pulled her hair into a smooth ponytail. After applying just enough makeup to accent her features without overpowering them, she surveyed herself in the mirror. It was the best it was going to get. She was no Sarah Jensen. She was Alison Colby; a slender, petite, still not fully developed young woman. Short of plastic surgery and breast enhancements, there was no changing that fact.

In truth, she'd seriously considered having her breasts enlarged with plastic surgery, but Arthur claimed they were a perfect B cup that suited her body just fine. Since he was the only man she'd ever fooled around with, she trusted his word.

Looking back, she was thankful she never went all the way with him. It would have made his deceitfulness much more painful. She was sure Sarah slept with him whenever she came around. Perhaps that was why he kept going back with her. If it was, then shame on her for not seeing him for the shallow horn-toad he was.

Alison was no prude, but she believed in saving certain experiences to be enjoyed with the right person. She thought that right person was Arthur and came very close to sleeping with him, but a nagging in the back of her mind wouldn't let her go beyond fooling around. When she discovered that Arthur was secretly seeing Sarah, she understood her inner warning. From that moment on, she promised herself she would listen to those warnings.

Her mind settled back on Nick. Was it a warning she was getting about him or something else? It wasn't clear, but she knew there was something beneath the story that needed to come to the surface before she could relax and trust him.

Cold air rushed past her as she stood up to leave the overly furnished, run down bedroom. She shuddered and remembered how she used to believe the house was haunted. She even thought she'd seen a ghost or two while growing up. Now that she was older, she no longer thought that it was haunted. Not by ghosts, anyway. If it was haunted at all, it was by the memory imprints that come from lives being led within its walls for several centuries.

The house had endured -and survived- the civil war. The memory imprints from that alone could fill a house with feelings that a sensitive like her would detect.

It took her years to realize that she was what society referred to as a sensitive. Some people tried to label her a psychic, but she didn't believe she was that. Psychics could tell the future. All she could do was feel the thoughts and memories that clung to buildings and places.

“Good morning,” Nick said as he stood at the bottom of the stairs looking up at Alison as she started to descend the elegant stairway.

Alison was so engrossed in her thoughts about Nick, that seeing him in the flesh startled her. Her body jolted and she missed the top tread. A slight squeal escaped her small, well-shaped mouth as she reached for the banister to catch herself. Coordination was never one of her strong points and it showed as her hand clumsily missed the rail and she started to tumble forward.

Nick was at the top of the steps with lightning speed. He swept her into his arms and descended the stairs a little slower than he ascended them, but still faster than the average person. Alison was speechless as he set her down and held her until he was certain she regained her balance.

“Thanks,” she managed to whisper.

His eyes locked with hers in a way that made it impossible for her to breathe. “That shirt brings out the color of your eyes. You have beautiful eyes.”

“You’re beautiful too,” she replied without realizing what she was saying.

The impact of her blunder broke the spell of the moment. Her cheeks went scarlet and she turned her face away from him. Instead of releasing her, he gently pulled her face back toward him and kissed her in a long, slow, and oh-so-delicious way.

Rather than slap him silly for his impudence, she melted in his arms. Once again, her legs refused to hold her, and she was at the mercy of his solid body for support. She tingled from head to toe by the time he stopped kissing her. He held her for a moment while he assessed her ability to stand on her own. When he was satisfied, he released her and left the foyer without a backward glance.

\*\*\*

Nick muttered to himself as he entered the kitchen. He couldn’t believe he did something as stupid as kissing her. It was too much too soon. Even though he’d loved her from afar, technically, they’d only met the night before. What was he thinking? The problem was, he wasn’t thinking. He was responding to the sensation that flooded his body whenever she was near. He’d heard about it happening, but he never gave it much thought because he’d never experienced it until Alison showed up. Now, to add to everything else on his plate, he would have to refrain from succumbing to the desire to take her in his arms and possess her every time she walked by.

Wilma set the flowers she’d just brought in from the garden onto the edge of the sink. “What happened?” she asked accusingly.

“I don’t need this,” he snarled.

“Why is ‘what did you do’ on the tip of my tongue?” she said as she placed her hands on her hips.

Nick pounded his fist on the counter. “Neither Elsie or Beth warned me. I’m not prepared for her.”

“Maybe they didn’t know,” Wilma said softly.

“Of course, they knew,” he snarled. “As did you.”

“So, she sees ghosts,” Wilma shrugged. “Lots of people see them. What’s the big deal?”

“I’m not talking about that and you know it,” Nick said. “I’m talking about the fact that we’re connected.”

Wilma forced a frown. “I’m not following you.”

“I’m going to my cottage,” he grumbled. “I won’t be available for the rest of the day, so, DON’T have any emergencies.”

“Yes, sir,” Wilma said with a mock salute.